

Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women

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Rural Battered Women

Battered women living in rural areas have many of the same experiences as battered women everywhere. But rural battered women have certain experiences and face certain barriers that are unique to rural settings.

Batterers commonly isolate their victims as one tactic of maintaining power and control over their victims. They frequently:

- Refuse access to family vehicles or prevent a woman from getting a driver's license;
- Ridicule her in front of friends and family so that she's reluctant to have them come to her home;
- Accuse her of flirting or having affairs and because of this suspicion, beating her for even limited contact with another person;
- Remove the telephone when leaving the home or calling her every hour to monitor her whereabouts;
- Threaten or beat her when she returns from an outing with women friends;
- Threaten to kill her if she tells anyone about the abuse.

A woman isolated in these ways has a difficult time escaping from a violent partner. She fears leaving. She fears asking someone for help. Battered women everywhere experience some form of isolation as controlled by their partner, but for rural battered women the isolation becomes magnified by geographical isolation. Other rural factors can have an impact on a rural battered woman's isolation and changes of safe shelter. Consider that:

- A rural battered woman may not have phone service;
- Usually no public transportation exists, so if she leaves she must use a family vehicle;
- Police and medical response to a call may be a long time in arriving;
- Rural areas have fewer resources available to women—jobs, childcare, housing, and health care. Easy access to these resources is limited by distance;
- Extreme weather conditions often exaggerate isolation—cold, snow, and mud regularly affect life in rural areas and may extend periods of isolation with an abuser;
- Poor roads thwart transportation;
- Seasonal work may mean months of unemployment on a regular basis and result in women being trapped with an abuser for long periods of time;
- Hunting weapons are common to rural homes and everyday tools like axes, chains, mauls, and pitchforks are also potential weapons;
- Alcohol (and drug) use, which often increases in winter months when rural people are underemployed and isolated in their homes, usually affects the frequency and severity of abuse;
- Traveling to the “big city” can be intimidating to rural battered women and city attitudes may seem strange and unaccepting of her ways;
- A woman's bruises may fade or heal before she sees a neighbor, and working with farm tools and equipment can provide an easy explanation of her injuries;
- Farm families are often one-income families and a woman frequently has no money of her own to support herself and her children;

- A family's finances are often tied up in land or equipment, so a woman thinking of ending a relationship may face the agonizing reality that she and her partner may lose the family farm or her partner will be left with no means of income;
- Court orders restraining an abuser from having a contact with a woman are less viable for rural women because their partners cannot be kept away from the farm if it their only source of income;
- Rural women frequently have strong emotional ties to the land and to farm animals and if she has an attachment to her animals, she may fear that her animals will be neglected or harmed if she leaves;
- Rural women are usually an integral part of a family farm business, so if she leaves the business may fail.

Rural battered women have unique problems, but alternatives to living without abuse do exist. A battered women's program can provide personal support, safety planning for you and your children, information about options available to you, transportation, legal information, safe shelter, and referrals to financial assistance, job training, and education options.

Get Help and Find Safety:

For assistance in finding help for all types of abuse, call the Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women during business hours at (651) 646-6177 or our after hours crisis line at (651) 646-0994. Out of the Metro area? Call the Minnesota Domestic Violence Crisis Line toll-free at 866-223-1111.